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at least one plug element, provided in a region corresponding to an ink supply port of the ink cartridge, for sealing an ink supply needle that supplies ink to an ink jet recording head wherein said maintenance cartridge is a dummy cartridge that does not store fluid or supply fluid to the recording apparatus.

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11. (Amended) An ink jet recording apparatus adapted to mount at least two ink cartridges having ink supply ports and memory devices, and at least one maintenance cartridge having an outward form the same or substantially the same as the corresponding ink cartridge, a plug element provided in a region corresponding to the ink supply port of the corresponding ink cartridge, and a memory device, the ink jet recording apparatus comprising:

ink supply needles, each being removably attachable to the ink supply port and sealable by the plug element;

an ink jet recording head adapted to be supplied with ink from the ink cartridges through the ink supply ports and the ink supply needles;

a control system adapted to read data from the memory devices of the ink cartridges and the maintenance cartridge to control a recording operation of the apparatus,

wherein when the control system detects, based on the data read from the memory device of the maintenance cartridge, that the maintenance cartridge is attached to the recording apparatus, the control system executes a substitute printing operation using ink in the ink cartridge or ink cartridges mounted to the recording apparatus.

12. (Amended) An ink jet recording apparatus adapted to mount an ink cartridge having at least one ink supply port, the recording apparatus comprising:

at least one ink supply needle corresponding to and removably attachable to the at least one ink supply port;

a recording head adapted to be supplied with ink from the ink cartridge through the at least one ink supply needle and the at least one ink supply port;

at least one maintenance cartridge mounted to the recording apparatus, and provided with at least one plug element corresponding in location to the at least one ink supply port of the ink cartridge, wherein the at least one plug element seals the at least one ink supply needle, wherein the at least one maintenance cartridge does not hold fluid or supply fluid to the recording head.

13. (Amended) An ink jet recording apparatus adapted to mount a plurality of ink cartridges having ink supply ports, the recording apparatus comprising:

ink supply needles corresponding to and removably attachable to the ink supply ports;

a recording head adapted to be supplied with ink from the ink cartridges through the ink supply needles and the ink supply ports;

at least one maintenance cartridge mounted to the recording apparatus, and provided with plug elements corresponding in location to the at the ink supply port of the ink cartridges, wherein the plug elements corresponds to and seal the ink supply needles and prevents the

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evaporation of a fluid contained in the recording head, wherein the at least one maintenance cartridge does not hold fluid or supply fluid to the recording head.

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30. (Amended) A maintenance cartridge for a recording apparatus, comprising:

a body mountable to the recording apparatus at a position at which an ink cartridge is to be mounted to the recording apparatus, wherein the recording apparatus comprises a recording head and an ink supply passage providing a fluid connection to the recording head; and

a plug element that seals the ink supply passage that supplies ink to the recording head wherein the body is incapable of holding fluid or supplying fluid to the recording head.

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